

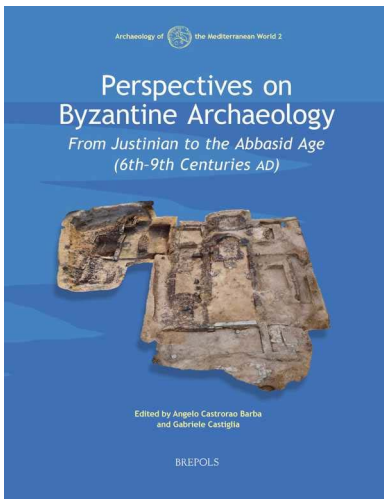
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ANGELO CASTRORAO BARBA & GABRIELE CASTIGLIA (ed.). 2022. *Perspectives on Byzantine archaeology: from Justinian to the Abbasid Age (6th–9th centuries AD)*. Archaeology of the Mediterranean World 2. Turnhout: Brepols; 978-2-503-59684-6 paperback €85.



The advent of Covid-19 in 2020 abruptly halted countless academic projects, including a conference scheduled to be held in Rome in March 2020 entitled ‘Perspectives on Byzantine archaeology from Justinian to the Abbasid Age (6th–9th centuries AD)’. The two conference organisers, Angelo Castrorao Barba and Gabriele Castiglia, decided to convert the conference into a book instead as they wished to place their own two projects about the Byzantine period—one on Sicily and one on the Horn of Africa—in the larger context of Late Antiquity and Early Medieval society.

In the first chapter, the editors provide an introduction that outlines the topics and arguments of the chapters. They also give a thorough explanation on

why the term Byzantine is used for this volume, deeming that this term is best suited to describe the setting of the Mediterranean and beyond during this period, even though numerous geographical, political and cultural contexts are being discussed.

The main part of the book is divided into three sections: the first with three chapters on cities; the second with seven chapters on landscapes; and the third with three chapters on material culture. The second chapter, which begins the first section, analyses the transitional period from the sixth century until Thessaloniki was sacked by the Saracens in 904. Konstantinos Raptis focuses on Christian structures and highlights that, contrary to popular conjecture, the city lacks substantial architecture that can be traced to Justinian I’s rule. Furthermore, despite several earthquakes and incursions by Slavs and Avars, there is a pattern of continuity within the ecclesiastical buildings and the whole city of Thessaloniki. Conversely, in the

following chapter, Lucrezia Spera looks at Rome's urban defence systems during the Gothic War (sixth century). During the conflict, the Aurelian Walls were significantly restored, particularly in terms of the incorporation of Christian features, such as the renaming of the city gates and the construction of clerical monuments near this defensive structure. Spera emphasises through this the strong links between Christian saints and urban defences, as well as the influx of cults of military saints from the eastern side of the Empire. Chapter 4, by Enrico Cirelli, remains in Italy and focuses on Ravenna and uses multiple maps to demonstrate the different changes the city underwent throughout the years.

The fifth chapter, the first on landscapes, examines the sixth century in the Levant and questions whether or not a Justinian renaissance occurred in the East. Basema Hamarneh delivers a good examination of the epigraphic evidence for the Justinianic plague, concluding that it caused a brief period of collapse, but it was not the main element in the decline of the Eastern Roman Empire. While assuming that up to one-third of the population died in the plague, implying a smaller workforce and less need for food, it is strange that the author states instead that environmental overexploitation was one of the major causes of decline.

Chapter 6 studies the landscape around Umm al-Rasa along the *Limes Arabicus* and provides an excellent overview on the region and its inhabitants during the studied period. Carmelo Pallardo uses resilience theory and the adaptive cycle (Sauer 2015: 34) to examine how this site changed from a military post to an inhabited settlement. This approach highlights effectively how the inhabitants adapted to the changes the region underwent. The settled landscapes of the Peloponnese are discussed in Chapter 7, which studies numerous excavations conducted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Priscilla Ralli presents and applies 'third-space' theory to do this (Veikou 2009), aptly illuminating the nuanced interaction between city and countryside through various examples. The eighth chapter is similar to the sixth, in that Ivan Gargano explores the Limes along the Lower Danube by discussing the controversial nature of 'De Aedificis' by Procopius, deeming it an unreliable source on the changes in the administrative organisation of the region.

The following chapter is completely different in tone. Rather than describing archaeological analyses and finds, Paul Arthur presents the adventurous new project called Byzantine Heritage of Southern Italy, which aims to further explore the people living in the settlements during the Byzantine period. Chapter 10 stays in the region and Giuseppe Cacciaguerra and Angelo Castorao Barba examine the Sicilian countryside during the Byzantine period. This is an excellent piece of research with a good review of all the surveys conducted in that region; however, it would have been helpful to present the results with graphs depicting the changes in the number and size of settlements. The last chapter of this section discusses the not-often-researched landscape of the Horn of Africa in the context of Early Christianity; Gabriele Castiglia and Philippe Pergola concentrate on the dates of the construction of the ecclesiastical structures.

The third section is about material culture and begins with Chapter 12, in which Flavia Marani extensively reviews and compares the circulation of coinage in Rome and Naples. In the next chapter, María de los Ángeles Utrero Agudo debates whether there is significant Byzantine influence on Late Antique and Early Medieval ecclesiastical structures in Hispania. The final chapter provides a thorough study and analysis of the distribution of Early Byzantine

pottery finds using numerous maps, with special attention paid to the Late Roman Amphora 2/13. Joanita Vroom's chapter is an excellent example of how an overview of the distribution of a pottery type should be written and how it can be used convincingly to highlight, in this case, the strength and resilience of the city of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire.

To summarise, this volume covers all geographical areas of the Byzantine sphere, from Hispania to Aksum, contrasts little-known places of the Byzantine world, and publishes new material pertinent to the discussion topics. This book is vital for anybody exploring this time period and is an important addition to the academic scholarship of the Byzantine period, especially given the increased interest in the alleged consequences of epidemiological and climatic events.

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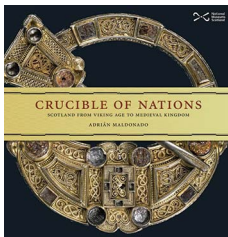
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ADRIÁN MALDONADO. 2021. *Crucible of nations: Scotland from Viking Age to Medieval Kingdom*. Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland; 978-1-910682-43-2 paperback £25.



Previous research undertaken within the remit of the Glenmorangie Research Project, on behalf of National Museums Scotland (see 'Glenmorangie Research Project into Early Medieval Scotland' website), resulted in the publication of *Early Medieval Scotland* (2012) and *Scotland's Early Silver* (2017). The volumes investigated and celebrated Scotland's early medieval material culture and heritage through the collections of National Museums Scotland. In the third volume, which is the outcome of a research fellowship, Adrián

Maldonado tackles the Viking Age from the fall of the Picts to the rise of Alba.

Maldonado's ambition for his fellowship was to investigate the transformations that occurred during the late first and early second millennium AD, and to explore the changes and continuities which resulted in a unified kingdom of Scots. This substantial publication successfully meets that objective with its eight richly illustrated chapters and highlights, which focus on individual projects, ideas, sites and finds.

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